

Joint Injections

A guide for young people

What is a joint injection?

Joint injection is a treatment that is used in JIA. Your doctor will insert a needle into a joint to remove some fluid, and then inject medicine. Most people notice that the joint is a lot less sore and swollen within a few days after the injection.

Why do I need a joint injection?

Joint injections reduce inflammation and pain in swollen or sore joints. If you only have a few joints swollen, joint injections may be the only therapy you need. If you are on medicines already and still have swollen joints, joint injections may save having to increase doses or change medication.

What will happen when I get a joint injection?

Before the joint injection:

- Don't eat or drink for at least four hours before an injection, including chewing gum and lollies. This is because the medicine used to help put you to sleep might make you sick if you have eaten something.
- Wear loose clothes that can be pulled up to uncover the joint(s) that need to be injected.

During the injection:

- Your mum or dad can go into theatre with you until you have been put to sleep by the anaesthetic doctor.
- The operation theatre is a room with a bed and some equipment. A nurse will be there to check you are OK. The anaesthetic doctor will put you to sleep by getting you to breathe through a mask (gas anaesthetic) or by injection through an intravenous cannula (IV anaesthetic). These may cause pain or be uncomfortable, but this is usually manageable. It is very important to keep relaxed and calm before going to sleep, as this helps you be calm when you wake up. This will happen in the 'Recovery Room' where another nurse will be looking after you.

Your rheumatologist will do the joint injection. The doctor will remove your clothes from around the joint and clean your skin with a cleaning solution.

- The doctor may pull some fluid from the joint into the syringe. Sometimes there is a bit of blood mixed in. This is normal.
- Without taking the needle out, the doctor will take off the syringe with fluid in it and connect another syringe with medicine in it. The medicine is injected into the joint.
- Then the doctor will take the needle out and put a dressing on. The whole joint injection takes about 10-20 minutes, depending how many joints are being injected.

Side Effects of Joint Injection:

There are a few possible side effects from a joint injection, but these are usually not serious.

- Subcutaneous fat atrophy. This appears as a dimple at the point where the needle went in. It is more commonly seen in certain joints such as the ankles, wrists and the small joints of the foot. These skin changes usually recover over time.
- Infection of the joint is very unlikely due to the skin being cleaned very carefully before injecting.
- If there are many joints being injected there may be a temporary systemic effect of the steroid. This can cause a round looking face, acne, mood changes and increased appetite. This lasts a couple of weeks and then goes away, and it does not cause any long term side effects.

After the joint injection:

- You will stay at the hospital until the effects of the anaesthetics have worn off. Then you may have something to eat and drink. Some people may feel a little sick or throw up when they wake up, this is normal. The nurse then may give you some medicine to help settle your stomach down. Once you feel back to normal again, you can go home.
- For 24 hours after the injection you need to rest and avoid using the joint too much. If hips, knees, ankles or foot joints are injected try and NOT put weight on them as much as possible. Of course, you can go to the toilet or sit at the table to have something to eat.

Some people may experience some pain, especially if a small joint has been injected. This is normal and is usually helped by paracetamol (Panadol) or ibuprofen (Nurofen)